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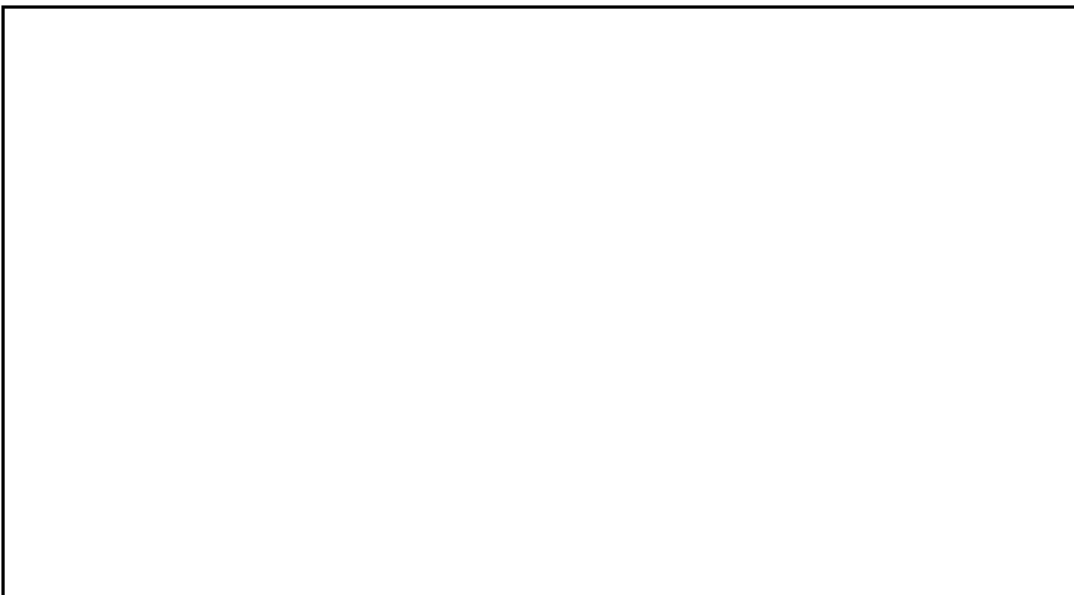
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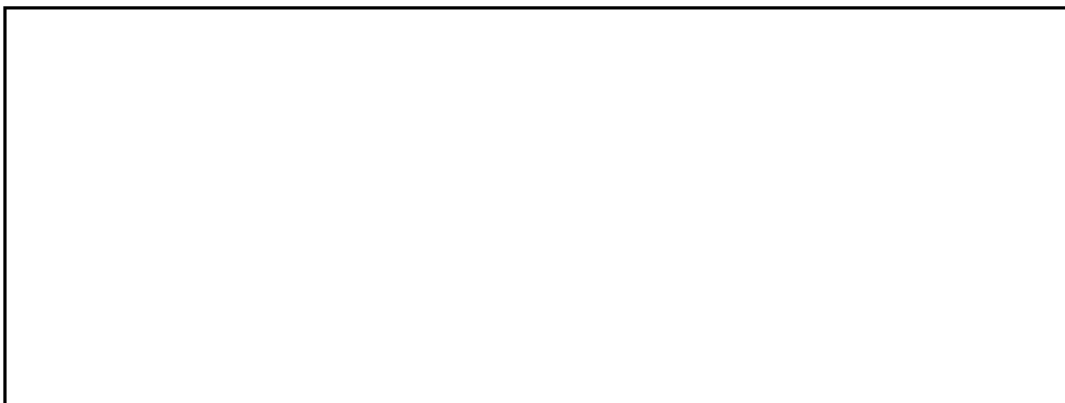
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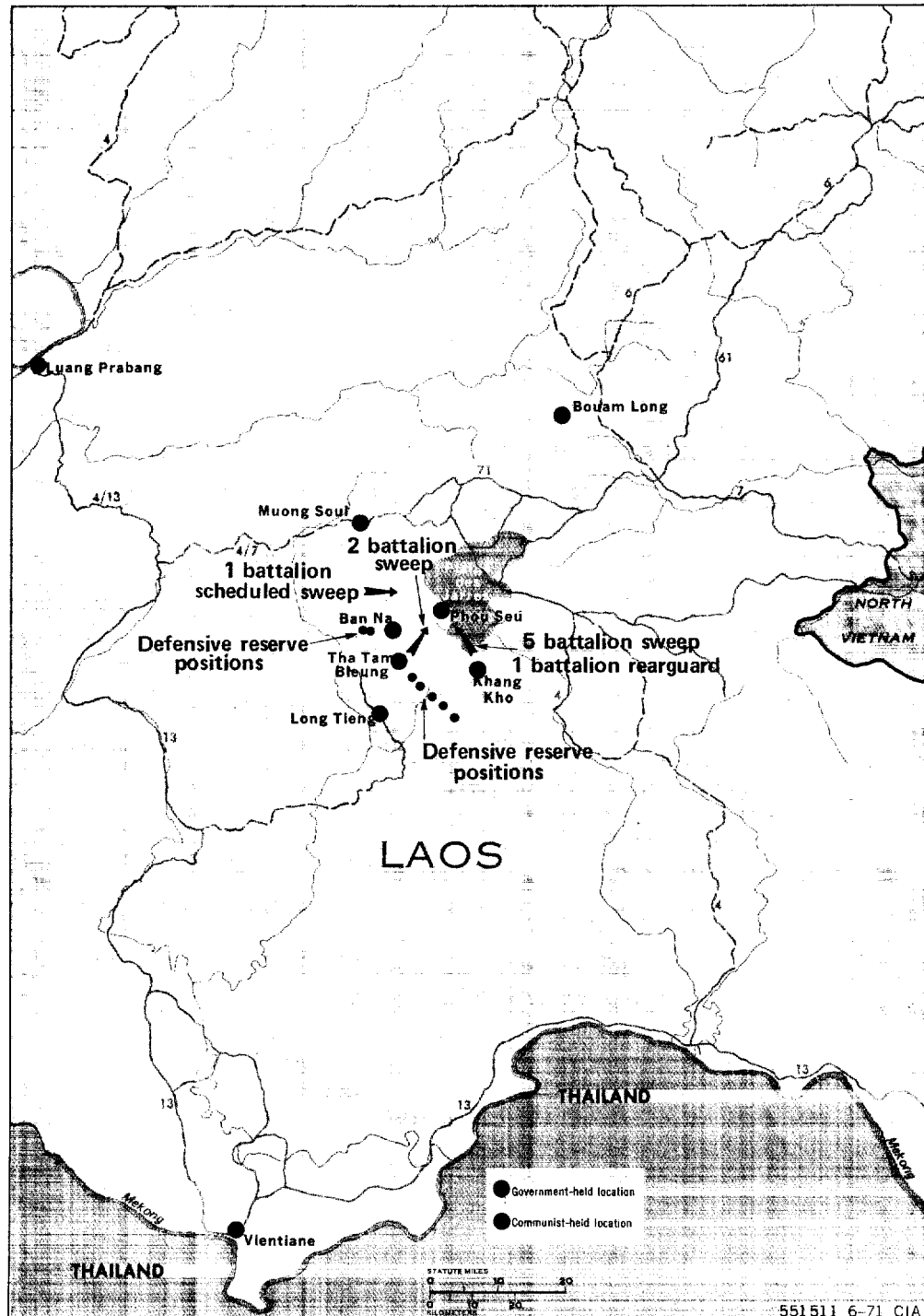
LAOS: Government operation in the Plaine des Jarres.
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GUATEMALA: Assassinations. (Page 12)



Northern Laos



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LAOS: The government has launched an operation to clear Communist forces from the southern and western portions of the Plaine des Jarres.

The operation, the initial phases of which are already under way, is to be conducted by nine battalions of General Vang Pao's Meo and Lao troops, with seven more battalions held in defensive reserve positions north and east of Long Tieng. The total irregular force numbers about 4,000 men. Five battalions are sweeping across the southern Plaine from Khang Kho toward Phou Seu, with one battalion providing rear guard security. Two others are moving toward Phou Seu from the vicinity of Tha Tam Bleung. The ninth battalion is scheduled to move eastward toward the Plaine from a base northwest of Ban Na.

The operation is designed to make the Communists' position west of the Plaine untenable by capturing supplies in the southern and western portions of the Plaine and by taking the high ground commanding the infiltration routes toward the Long Tieng complex. Vang Pao would like to eliminate the Communist foothold west of the Plaine to forestall another dry season offensive against the Long Tieng complex. Another purpose of the operation is to lessen Communist pressure against the guerrilla base at Bouam Long. A redeployment of Communist forces back to the Plaine, however, would prove counterproductive. Aside from the tactical considerations, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma has been urging Vang Pao to undertake an offensive, presumably to take the sting out of recent Communist gains in south Laos and to improve the government's bargaining position in possibly forthcoming peace negotiations.

The irregulars so far have met little enemy opposition and have successfully located and destroyed some Communist supplies. They have moved relatively easily so far because Communist strength south and west of the Plaine has been reduced in the last month or so by the redeployment of at least four battalions of main-force troops to the Bouam Long region north

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of the Plaine. Remaining enemy units near the southern Plaine probably consist of four or five battalions, plus an armored unit. In addition, three more Communist battalions are in positions near Ban Na.

The recent reduction of enemy forces around the Long Tieng complex suggests either that the North Vietnamese may want to ease the logistic problem of sustaining a large force west of the Plaine during the rainy season or do not place high priority on an early resumption of their Long Tieng offensive in the fall.

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GUATEMALA: The assassination of an army colonel on 4 June may be a prelude to an attempt against a US official.

The Communist Party had planned [redacted] to kill in succession a military leader, a US official, and a local industrialist. The central committee reportedly decided to risk these actions despite the party's growing losses in leaders, safehouses, and other assets under the state of siege imposed last November.

[redacted] disagreement within the government over continuing the state of siege. The congressional leadership and other of President Arana's civilian advisers are pressing him to end the present security measures, which give the military pre-emptive powers and forbid normal political activity. Civilian leaders are apparently growing restive over the long-term dilution of their political powers and concerned that their constituency is being alienated. Military officers overwhelmingly support continuance of the security measures as they stand.

Arana has no significant reason to accede to the political pressure, especially since the violence level continues to rise. The count of political deaths for May is expected to exceed the 80 estimated for April. Most of the deaths appear to result from the government's counterterror operations, which have hurt--but evidently have not vitally damaged--the insurgent organizations.

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